

OBITUARY

Raymond Alford Palmer, 1939–2011



Raymond Alford Palmer, medical librarian and former executive director of the Medical Library Association (MLA), died suddenly on November 9, 2011, while in his physician's waiting room in Chicago. He was seventy-two years old.

Ray received his undergraduate degree from the University of Louisville and a graduate degree in library science from the University of Kentucky in 1966. He began his medical library career in Baltimore, serving as administrative assistant to the director of the Johns Hopkins Welch Medical Library. His next position was at another prestigious medical library, the Countway Library of Medicine at Harvard University, where he served as assistant librarian. These early medical library positions were with two highly regarded library leaders, Alfred Brandon at the Welch Medical Library and Harold Bloomquist at the Countway Library of Medicine. Working closely with these directors gave him the foundation for his next position. In 1974, he was appointed medical and health sciences librarian and assistant professor of library administration at the Fordham Health Sciences Library, Wright State University, in Dayton, Ohio.

As founding librarian of the Fordham Health Sciences Library, he worked with architects in designing the library. He developed the library's collections and recruited a talented staff. During his years at the Fordham, he actively participated in the Dayton-Miami Valley Consortium, the Kent-Ohio-Michigan Regional Medical Library Program, and the Miami Valley Association of Health Sciences Libraries, as well as MLA. He chaired many MLA committees in the area of education, the new MLA Certification Code, the MLA-Na-

tional Library of Medicine (NLM) Liaison Committee, and many committees of the Midwest Regional Group of MLA.

His experiences in library services and administration served him well as he moved in a new direction. In 1982, Ray was appointed MLA executive director by President Charles W. Sargent, AHIP, FMLA. He came to MLA in a time of financial restraint. Headquarters had no records in machine-readable form, and the work of the staff was labor-intensive. He described the business activities of the association as "antediluvian." His first challenges were daunting. He had to obtain an up-to-date automated system for managing MLA records and to revamp and revitalize the staff, all in a time of dwindling financial resources [1].

In 1983, President Nancy Lorenzi, AHIP, FMLA, introduced his first state of the association report to the membership in this way: "Ray Palmer and his excellent staff have achieved what amounts to almost a miracle this past year" [2]. His report outlined the board's specific goals for the association:

- upgrade and improve current programs
- create innovative new ones
- launch an aggressive membership drive
- implement future-oriented strategic planning

In addition, he began a program to reorganize the operations of headquarters, including a business plan and installation of a fully automated system to handle subscriptions, files, registration, and documents. MLA members responded by approving a dues increase, developing a successful membership drive, and establishing an active legislative program with the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries. Change had begun.

Less than a year after Ray was hired as executive director, the MLA Board launched a strategic planning process under the lead-

ership of President-Elect Lorenzi. Ray encouraged successive presidents to continue these planning efforts. In 1986, he was responsible for hiring a senior management consultant, who worked intensively with the MLA Board and the membership over a two-year period to create an outward looking, dynamic plan for the association, *Shaping the Future*. The plan gave MLA its first framework for decision making and moved the membership toward common goals. Ray's support, guidance, and personal commitment were crucial to the success of the strategic planning effort [3].

By 1987, with *Shaping the Future* and a strong financial team in place, the association continued to pursue its goals in professional development, publishing, a legislative agenda, and an advanced continuing education (CE) program nurtured by Kent Mayfield, MLA's director of education. All of these programs were supported by Ray. Ray's 1991 report to the membership was a ten-year retrospective that compared the growth and development of the association's program (Table 1) [4].

During his MLA years, Ray wrote a number of editorials for the *BMLA* on areas of interest to health professionals and championed the value of health-related information. His influential paper, "Effect of Federal Programs on Health Sciences Libraries," was published in 1987 in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*. This paper outlined how NLM's programs and activities had an impact on health sciences libraries, including the development of MEDLARS, implementation of the Medical Library Assistance Act, and defense of "fair use" of copyrighted works [5].

Among his other significant publications was "The Hospital Library Is Crucial to Quality Healthcare," published in *Hospital Topics* in 1991. The paper was a response to the Department of Health and Hu-

Table 1

Comparisons of the growth and development of the Medical Library Association (MLA) from the 1991 executive director's report

Program area	Before 1990	After 1990
Continuing education	1980: 33 MLA-developed courses	1990: 9 MLA-developed courses and 24 new Perspectives courses
Publishing	Pre-1989: <i>Bulletin of the Medical Library Association (BMLA)</i> had many designs and styles	1989: <i>BMLA</i> redesigned and enlarged
Office system	1982: Typewriters and one photocopy machine	1991: Upgraded automated system
Legislation	1982: No formal association with other groups	1991: Only library association with lobbyist on the Hill; Joint Legislative Task Force makes visit to the Hill; coalitions developed with Special Libraries Association and American Library Association
Budget	1982: \$100,000 deficit	1991: MLA has a \$500,000 budget

man Services ruling that eliminated maintaining a hospital library as a qualification for reimbursement for Medicare and Medicaid [6]. Both articles addressed the vital issues of that era and pointed to the importance and value of health sciences libraries.

Both as a member and as executive director of MLA, Ray made enduring contributions in the area of education for medical librarianship. He chaired the MLA Continuing Education Committee during its early years when committee members had full responsibility for the program. Committee members planned the curriculum, either developed courses or arranged for their development, planned the annual meeting CE offerings, visited the site to make arrangements, maintained all the necessary supplies for the meeting, shipped them there, and shipped them home after the meeting. A short-staffed central office could give little assistance. Ray supported all of MLA's educational initiatives and interacted with other associations to promote medical library education. He gave individual lectures to classes in library education programs and taught several courses, including a summer session at the University of North Carolina [7].

Following his years at MLA, from 1982–1991, Ray continued to serve in administrative positions

with two health-related organizations: the Federation of the American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) and the Agency for Maternal and Child Health, both in Washington, DC.

Upon retirement, he returned to Chicago, his favorite city, where he had a wide circle of friends. He had time to explore his interests in art and antiques. He continued to collect first editions of his favorite authors and to sing in his church choir. One of the joys of his retirement was the companionship of his dogs. He enjoyed cooking to the delight of his friends, often preparing dishes from his Southern roots. Although he spent the bulk of his life away from the South, he remained a true Southern gentleman.

Raymond Palmer made lasting contributions to MLA and the profession. Many of the programs he implemented either continue in use today or serve as the basis for a number of the association's current activities. In addition to his duties, he mentored and supported dozens of MLA officers and members. He was a true and loyal friend.

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